DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 122 190 CG 010 521

AUTHOR Salzberg, Bernard; Smith, Nancy E.
TITLE Program for Peer Relationship Development.
PUB DATE [74]
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Rocky Mountain Psychological Association (Salt Lake City, Utah, May 7-10, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Problems; Children; Elementary Education; *Group Guidance; *Interpersonal Competence; Peer Groups; *Peer Relationship; Program Descriptions; Psychological Studies; Skill Development; *Social Development

ABSTRACT

Children, aged 10-12, were referred to an outpatient mental health center because of behavior problems, some involving social skill deficits, others not so involved. Children acknowledging a social skill problem, and a desire to do something about it, were chosen pending parent approval and cooperation. Prior to participation in the group, children and their parents were interviewed to determine what goals each wanted to pursue within the program. The group met once a week for an hour and a half. Specific social skills deficits were pinpointed for each child, and deficits common to all the children were also identified. The techniques used during the group meetings included relaxation training, modeling, rehearsal, and game-playing. Social and non-social reinforcement were utilized. The group setting allowed children to practice newly-acquired social skills in a non-threatening atmosphere, and to become aware of behaviors which were "Turning off" their peers. A prescriptive program was worked out with the family of each child, in order to provide maximum generalization for newly-acquired social skills. Problems encountered in the operating groups of this type are discussed, and alternative solutions explored. (Author/CJ)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED122190

PROGRAM FOR PEER RELATIONSHIP DEVELOPMENT

Bernard Salzberg and Nancy E. Smith

Children's Behavioral Services
Las Vegas, Nevada

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

INTRODUCTION

The program described in this paper was conducted at Children's Behavioral Services, a mental health agency supported by the Nevada State Department of Mental Hygiene. Impetus for the study stemmed from parental requests for outpatient clinical services to help children with peer relationship problems. Because of the complexity and heterogeneity of social behaviors it was decided that the best approach to this problem was to provide in vivo experience by means of a children's group which would meet at the agency under the supervision of trained staff, two females and one male, who were skilled at response priming, behavior shaping, and reinforcement techniques.

Although social interactions have been investigated with disturbed children (Carlin and Armstrong, 1968; Simpkins, 1971), with young children (Shepard, Shank, and Wilson, 1974), and with mentally retarded children (Watson and Watson, 1967) we found little in the literature relating to a target population like ours, that is; average I.Q., non-institutionalized, 10-12 years of age functioning relatively well at home and school. Conceptualization for our program derived partially from Thoreson's work with groups of high school teenagers (1973) and from general learning theory background and information, cf. Bandura (1969).

METHOD

Subjects and Setting

Children were referred primarily for behavior problems involving

CG010521

social skill deficits. The first nine children between the ages of 10 and 12, whose main problems were social skill deficits, and who acknowledged their problems and said they wanted to do something about them, and whose parents agreed to participate in a parent training program to teach behavior motivation techniques and procedures, were selected for inclusion into the group. Four girls and five boys were initially chosen following individual pre-group interviews. Three children, two girls and one boy, discontinued after the first two weeks.

The group met in a large conference room 14 feet by 24 feet which was carpeted and contained two tables and several chairs.

Procedure and Format

The group met for 1½ hours once a week for nine weeks. The general format for group meetings 2 - 8 was:

1.) Relaxation Training

During relaxation training children lay on a carpeted floor. A modified Jacobson (1929) technique was used. During the first four weeks training was initially divided into four sections progressing each week through a new muscle group. Muscle group regions were arms, head, upper body, and lower body and legs. Subsequently the relaxation training included all muscle groups. Each group meeting from week 2 through 8 began with relaxation training. Training lasted approximately fifteen minutes.

2.) Discussion of Problem

Group discussions were carried out weekly with everyone participating. Opportunity was given to children who wished to discuss a

specific problem they had experienced. Consequences of inappropriate behavior were discussed. Alternatives were suggested and discussed. Target behaviors that had been assigned the previous week were also discussed. When no specific or general problem area was introduced by a child, a staff member would mention a problem situation. These situations were usually specific to the children in the group and had been mentioned by the children during the pre-group interview as an area of personal difficulty. Caution was exercised not to put a particular child on the "spot". Each discussion lasted from 15 to 25 minutes.

3.) Modeling and Practice

Appropriate social behavior was modeled by staff members, occasionally using one of the children in the modeling situation. Following modeling the children were asked to practice the target behavior either in the group or with another child. Behaviors practiced usually derived from those discussed during the discussion period. Occasionally, behaviors mentioned by children during their pre-group interview were selected for practice. The modeling and practice lasted approximately 15 minutes. Children were asked to make an attempt to practice the target behaviors during the next week.

4.) Games

Since much of a child's interaction with other children is during leisure time, it was felt that games provided a natural element to the group sessions. Thirty minutes of each meeting was specified as game time. An assortment of games was introduced into the group setting, including 2, 3, and 4 person games. Games used throughout the meetings

included chess, checkers, Trouble, and cards. A series of cooperation games, devised by the staff, were introduced during the last meetings. These games required cooperation in order to reach a solution to a puzzle. Each person was given part of the answer and was required to request information from the other members. Books and puzzles were also available on the game table and the children were permitted to choose whatever they wanted during the game time. Social reinforcement was given for social interactions, fair play, willingness to share, and asking another child to play.

5.) Reinforcement and Shaping

Throughout the group meetings children were given social reinforcement such as verbal praise, smiles, pats on back, by staff members for appropriate responses. Inappropriate behaviors were ignored with the exception of extremely aggressive acts. A three minute timeout was employed for physically aggressive acts. During timeout the child was told to sit in a chair away from the group, but in the same room.

Variation from the above format occurred during sessions 1 and 9. Session 1 began with the group leader introducing the children, explaining the purpose of the group, and then seeing each child individually to administer a Q-sort. While this occurred children remaining in the group were allowed free play. Also present during this time were three observer-data collectors. Session 9 was identical to session 1 except that a summary of the group's activities was substituted for the introductory remarks of the first session.

Response Recording and Reliability

Children were observed simultaneously by three observers who

were seated near but not immediately adjacent to each other, alongside one wall of the room. Observers one and two were assigned different children to watch and observer three, whose scores provided reliability checks for the other observers, observed all children, half during the first 22 minutes and then the remaining children during the final 23 minutes. Observers watched all their assigned children simultaneously.

Approach and verbal behaviors were the two behaviors recorded. Approach behavior was defined as a move towards or interaction with another child and verbal behavior was considered as any audible verbalization directed to another child.

Observations were started after the group had been in session for 15 minutes and were continued for 45 minutes. During the first ten seconds of each minute verbal behaviors were recorded. Approach responses were observed and recorded for a ten-second interval occurring between 30 and 40 seconds into the minute. Only one mark could be made for each child in a single ten second interval. Reliability of the scoring procedure was determined by calculating the percentage of agreement between observers 1 and 3 and 2 and 3. Percentage of agreement was obtained by dividing the number of agreements by the total number of possible agreements and multiplying by 100. Reliability checks for sessions 1 and 9 between observers 1 and 3 and 2 and 3 yielded mean scores of 93% and 95% respectively.

A paper and pencil questionnaire, Q-sort, parent report, and teacher report were acquired at different times throughout the study. Please see Table 1 for a schedule of these events and appendices A, B, and C for a description of the instruments used.

RESULTS

Observational Data

The observational data collected for the four children who were present during both week 1 and week 9 meetings showed an overall increase in verbal and approach behaviors. The mean verbal response for the group was 3.5% pre- and 34.5% post-, with an overall increase of 31% in verbal responding. Three children demonstrated this increase while verbal behavior decreased for one child. The mean approach response for the group was 47% pre- and 56% post-, with an overall increase of 9% in approach responses. Two children evidenced an increase in approach responses while two showed a decrease. Specific individual data is shown in Table 2. Differences between pre- and post- group means for verbal and approach responses were not significant ($t=.33$, NS).

Q-Sort

There were two comparisons possible on the Q-sort. First, comparing "real" pre-group with "real" post-group ratings. The statements were given positive or negative values according to social standards. As an example "I have friends" was rated positive while "I feel nervous around other people" was given a negative rating. There were 12 positive statements, 10 negative statements and 3 which were questionable and consequently eliminated from the analysis. Five children completed the pre and post Q-sort, see Table 3. The net number of changes (derived by assigning a value of either plus or minus 1 to each statement change depending on whether the change was in a positive or negative direction, and then subtracting the total number of minus' from the total number of plus') showed a total increase of 18 positive statements, or an average of 3.5 per child. (sign test $z = 1.88$, $p. < .05$).

Four of the five who completed both the pre- and post- group testing children demonstrated an increase.

The net number of unit changes (obtained by subtracting the total magnitude of negative change from the total magnitude of positive change) showed an increase towards positive change of 47 units, or an average of 9.4 units per child. There was a significant change within the group toward the more desired self (Wilcoxen $z = 1.91$, $p < .05$). A positive unit change was seen in four of the five children.

Comparison was made between the difference between pre-group real and ideal self, and post-group real and ideal self. When the R2-I (post-group Real-Ideal) difference was greater than the R1-I (pre-group Real-Ideal) difference (overcorrection) the difference was scored as moving away from the ideal.

The net number of changes was in the direction of ideal self and totaled 19 or an average of 3.75 per client. (sign test, $z = 2.08$, $p < .025$). Four of the five children showed a net increase in the direction of ideal self. The net number of units of change in the direction of ideal self was 45, an average of 9 per client (significant at the $p. < .01$; $z = 2.56$, Wilcoxen). Again, four of the five children demonstrated an increase.

Parent Report

Each statement on the Parent Report was scored on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 representing the positive end of the scale. Pre- and post- group results are shown on Table 4 for each of the 5 children whose parents completed both reports. The net unit of change was 15, an average of 3 per child. There was a significant change (Wilcoxen,

$z = 1.71$, $p < .05$) in the positive direction for the group.

Children's Self Rating Inventory

This inventory was developed in an attempt to assess children's self perceptions across a wide range of their behaviors. No significant changes between pre- and post- group ratings occurred; however, it was interesting to note that on two items relating directly to social skills four children indicated self improvement on one ("Talk with children I don't know") and two showed improvement on the other ("Play well with children"). No child reported an overall decrease on the 25 items, although all children reported a decrease on at least one item.

DISCUSSION

This paper describes a small group program for teaching social skills to children. Although the data must be interpreted cautiously, it was felt that the approach described provides a viable means for teaching social skills to children. Several suggestions and observations are offered for those contemplating groups of this type.

Group Characteristics

The size of the present group was 6. A previous group included 4 children. The group with 4 provided greater opportunity for modeling and reinforcement of appropriate social behavior. In addition, children with social skill deficits appear to be less eager to practice in a large group (such as 6).

The current group consisted of both boys and girls. Two of the boys expressed a dislike for girls in the group. Perhaps same-sex groups would better serve for particular individual clients. This

could be determined during a pre-group interview. Although the ultimate goal would be to teach social skills across the sexes, initially, for certain children, a same-sex group might be more conducive to social skill development. For the majority, the mixed group was beneficial.

We began this group with an age requirement of 10-12 years. One of the children, a 10 year old, who attended for two weeks stopped attending. The remaining children were 11 and 12 years old. The group seemed more cohesive after the second week. Our feelings were that a group with a close age range 11-12, 8-9, or 9-10 shared common interests and was therefore more likely to succeed.

In an earlier group we allowed a child to attend who had multiple behavior problems; noncompliance, poor academic achievement, cruelty to animals, and whose parents were unwilling to participate in the parent training. The child discontinued attending following the fourth meeting and during the meetings he attended was uncooperative. We suggest that, based on our experience, it is important to elicit parental cooperation, and admit a child into the group setting only after the more severe behavioral problems are eliminated.

Group Format

During the initial planning stages, we set formal sections. We found that a degree of flexibility was essential, however, in the group. Topics which the staff planned were occasionally dismissed by the group as unimportant. After the first meeting, we came prepared with several topics for discussion. The modeling section was often indistinguishable from the discussion section. When a topic was discussed, a target behavior was introduced, and frequently discussed again after practice.

Game time was invaluable. During this time the staff was able to concentrate on each child in a social situation. Reinforcement was given for all social interactions. Also, during the first meetings, game time was used as a reinforcer for participation in the other sections of the group meeting.

Further study of the group process with children ages 8 through 12 is warranted. The preliminary data indicates positive benefits for the children from the group experience.

TABLE 1

Measurement Schedule

Measure	Week Before Group Started	First Week	Ninth Week	Tenth Week
Q-Sort: Real Self	X		X	
Q-Sort: Ideal Self		X		
Teacher Report		X	X	
Parent Report	X			X
Self Rating	X			X

TABLE 2

Observational Data

Client	Verbal			Approach		
	Pre	Post	Difference	Pre	Post	Difference
B1	0	24	24	26	43	17
B2	6	34	28	81	79	-2
B3	8	3	-5	81	18	-63
G1	0	77	77	0	85	85
Group Total	14	138	124	188	225	37
Group Mean	3.5	34.5	31	47	56	9.25

Observational data. Percentage of Verbal and Approach responses during pre- and post- group sessions for four children.

TABLE 3

Q-Sort

Client	Real		Ideal	
	Net Number of + changes	Net Magnitude of + changes	Net Number of + changes	Net Magnitude of + changes
B1	12	30	4	10
B2	-2	-2	-3	-4
B3	5	13	8	16
B4	1	3	5	13
G1	2	0	5	10
Group Total	18	47	19	45
Group $\bar{x}$	3.6	9.4	3.8	9

Q-Sort. Number and magnitude of changes from pre-group to post-group ratings for five children.

TABLE 4

Parent Report

Client	Pre	Post	Difference
B1	27	31	4
B2	29	25	-4
B3	24	30	6
B4	47	49	2
G1	39	46	7
Group Total	166	181	15
Group	33.2	36.2	3

Parent Report. Change in parent ratings of children's social behavior. Higher numbers indicate a more favorable rating.

APPENDIX A

Q-Sort Statements

Positive Statements

1. Feel that kids like me.
2. Happy most of the time.
3. Have friends.
4. Talk to new kids easily.
5. Make friends easily.
6. Feel that adults like me.
7. Keep friends.
8. Invite other children to my home.
9. Invite other kids to spend the night at my home.
10. Talk to kids in the neighborhood.
11. Play with children.
12. Talk to kids at school.

Negative Statements

1. Argue with parents.
2. Cry or sulk when I don't get my own way.
3. Fight with brothers and sisters.
4. Stretch the truth.
5. Play alone.
6. Throw temper tantrums.
7. Boss other children.
8. Boss adults.
9. Fight with children.
10. Feel lonely.

APPENDIX B

PARENT REPORT

MY CHILD:	SCALE Never 1	2	Sometimes 3	4	Always 5
1. Wanders about aimlessly					
2. Remarks there's nothing to do					
3. Watches TV alone					
4. Engages in solitary, independent play					
5. Watches others play from more than 10 feet distance					
6. Watches others play from less than 10 feet distance					
7. Approaches other kids					
8. Suggests activities to other kids					
9. Invites friends over in the afternoon					
10. Goes to school with one friend					
11. Goes to school with more than one friend					
12. Invites friends to spend the night					
13. Has friends over in the afternoon					
14. Has friends spend the night					
15. Studies with a friend					

APPENDIX C

Teacher _____

TEACHER REPORT

Date _____

Child's Name _____

SCALE

	Never	Almost Never	Some-times	Almost Always	Always
	1	2	3	4	5
1. Wanders about aimlessly					
2. Sits or stands alone					
3. Engages in solitary, independent play					
4. Does not invite others to join in play					
5. Watches others play from greater than 10 feet distance					
6. Watches others play from less than 10 feet distance					
7. Engages in same activities as other kids, but alone					
8. Permits another to join if encouraged					
9. Plays with others, but remains independent					
10. Shares with others when encouraged or asked					
11. Approaches other kids					
12. Says nice things to other kids					
13. Offers to share with others					
14. Suggests games or activities					
15. Asks others to play with him					
16. Plays with other kids					
17. Talks with other kids					
18. Cooperates with other children					
19. Answers questions in class					
20. Cooperates with teacher					